

Spanish Fork hopes for interchange rebuild

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SPANISH FORK — A scoring system that considers value to the public could make the difference whether the I-15 ramps to and from Main Street and U.S. 6 get rebuilt with the I-15 Corridor Expansion project.

The three design-build teams vying for the \$1.7 billion CORE contract have all taken a look at the maze of ramps that make up the system to see what improvements could be made, city engineer Richard Heap said. The most critical is the Main Street interchange, where traffic backs up under the narrow I-15 overpass during rush hour twice a day.

CORE seeks to rebuild I-15 from American Fork to Provo, then add two more high-occupancy vehicle lanes ending at Spanish Fork. However, Spanish Fork city officials and the state legislative group that represents south Utah County say that the Main Street and U.S. 6 interchange is a more critical rebuild than adding more HOV lanes.

Originally, the Utah Department of Transportation studied freeway improvements from 12300 South in Salt Lake County to Payson, a distance of 43 miles, CORE director Dal Hawks said Thursday at a gathering of state and local leaders and business owners affected by the heavy Main Street traffic.

In 2008, the Legislature earmarked \$2.6 billion for freeway improvements but then reduced it in 2009 to \$1.7 billion, he said. That set the stage for a reduced project from American Fork to Provo, but cost estimates have been dropping, so the three consortiums bidding on the project must show how much they can do in order to get the bid. The CORE project is to be completed by 2014.

All bids must be in by Nov. 19, while the target day to award the bid is Dec. 10. The three bidders are Flatiron-Skanska-Zachry, Provo River Constructors and Timpanogos Transportation Constructors. They are spending from \$5 million to \$8 million each to prepare their bids, Hawks said.

"The teams want to win this very badly," he said.

Two teams will be disappointed, but CORE will own the ideas of all three.

A key element is how far they can stretch their dollars to provide value to the motoring public. That would improve their scores to get the fixed-price bid.

"We won't know how much they can do until the proposals come in," Hawks said.

The designers are using models to judge anticipated traffic flow by 2030, which raised the potential for the Spanish Fork interchange rebuild. The interchange serves not just Spanish Fork, but all the communities around it. The consensus of the business community and the City Council is that the interchange is a top priority, said Rep. Mike Morley, R-Spanish Fork.

"We would prefer reconstruction of the interchange over HOV lanes," he said.

"The team that can give us the most scope is the one we'll select," Hawks said.

If Spanish Fork loses out, it could be several years before it gets another opportunity, Morley said. But other funding sources could become available, said Rep. Becky Lockhart, R-Provo.

"It's not all or nothing," she said. "The bidders are asking — that tells me they can do something down here."

"I want the hope to be there, but I don't want you to get addicted to hope," Hawks said.

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